
Speaking

Oral communication is a vital component of the English language arts curriculum and provides the base for growth in viewing, listening, reading, representing, and writing abilities. Effective speakers use both verbal and non-verbal communication.

A Reminder

It is important that teachers recognize that non-verbal communication is culture specific and be aware of the differences that may exist across cultures when students express themselves non-verbally.

As learning and applying the skills of oral English are so closely related, the classroom should be a place where the use of spoken language is sensitively supported and where active listening is developed and valued. While listening helps students to acquire knowledge and explore ideas, talk enables students to make connections between what students know and what they are learning. Effective classrooms are “conversational communities” (Allington & Johnson, 2001) where talk is central and where classroom environments encourage students to use genuine discussion and interaction to deepen their understanding and to collaborate as they explore their own and others’ ideas and texts.

Talk can be immediate and spontaneous or planned and deliberate. Confidence and enthusiasm are critical factors in oral language development and, because much oral language is immediate, it involves taking risks. Student learning is most effective when there is a relationship of mutual trust, when students’ oral language is accepted, and when a variety of communication styles are accommodated.

Talk serves **two important functions** in the classroom: the social and the intellectual. Students’ oral language skills develop in conjunction with expanding social awareness and the ability to reflect upon and reconstruct experience.

As a social function, talk helps students adjust to ideas and reformulate them to facilitate understanding. Within this function, students share information and ideas with listeners by speaking informally and by sharing through conversation. Talk is also used to form relationships through language.

Talk, as an intellectual function, shapes students’ perceptions of the world. Talking encourages students to transform knowledge as they sift through observations, evaluate information, and compare views. Talk that transforms knowledge increases students’ critical thinking abilities and retention.

Growth in oral communication revolves around increasing **fluency and effectiveness**. Students need to be able to speak clearly, using appropriate volume. They need to be able to give directions, follow directions, negotiate, ask questions, suggest answers, and organize and present information. Students need to adapt their speaking for different audiences, purposes, formats, and topics.

As students become more proficient speakers, they develop their abilities to:

Interact Socially

- use language and ideas appropriate to the situation
- respond to listeners’ verbal and non-verbal cues, restate ideas, and ask questions to clarify understandings
- use language to create images and to produce an emotional response
- acknowledge and be sensitive to others’ viewpoints.

Develop Self-awareness

- examine and explore personal points of view
- identify flaws in own and others’ reasoning
- determine what it is students need to know
- find effective ways of supporting opinions.

Inform

- provide essential information using key language patterns, proper sequencing, non-verbal cues, and appropriate intonation
- determine the type of presentation necessary in order for the listeners to benefit and learn
- reflect to determine if own language is appropriate to the listeners.

The Speaking Process

The speaking process includes activities that occur prior to, during, and after the actual speaking event.

Pre-Speaking (BEFORE): Planning and Organizing

Just as pre-writing precedes drafting, pre-speaking begins before students actually speak. Students’ experiences, observations, and interactions inside and outside of the classroom have an impact upon what students will say and how they will say it. Pre-speaking activities involve thought and reflection, and provide opportunities for students to plan and organize for speaking. Some purposes for pre-speaking follow.

To choose a speaking topic:

Students generate and explore ideas for speaking topics through a variety of pre-speaking activities such as the following:

- constructing thought webs and graphic organizers
- reading and researching
- listening to music
- viewing a video, an object, or a graphic
- listening to a speaker
- jotting down ideas
- reflecting upon personal experience.

To determine purpose:

Speakers talk to express ideas, emotions, and opinions, and to share information. Students must ask themselves, “What is my purpose for speaking?” Some purposes for speaking include the following:

- to express personal feelings, ideas, or viewpoints
- to tell a story
- to entertain or amuse
- to inform or explain
- to persuade
- to request
- to inquire or question
- to clarify thinking
- to converse and discuss.

To determine audience:

Speakers must ask themselves “Who is my intended audience?” Some possible audiences are:

- familiar, known audiences (e.g., friends, peers, family, teachers)
- extended, known audiences (e.g., community, student body)
- extended, unknown audiences (e.g., local media).

To determine format:

Speakers must consider how their ideas and information can be presented most effectively. Some possible formats include the following:

- conversation
- discussion
- formal speech
- dramatic presentation
- monologue
- Reader’s Theatre.

See the Writing and Representing sections for a variety of planning and organizing suggestions that also can be useful as pre-speaking scaffolds.

Speaking (DURING): Going Public

Students who have been provided with supportive, collaborative environments and opportunities to prepare for informal and formal speaking experiences are more likely to have the confidence needed to “go public” with student ideas and information.

- In order to communicate and interact with others, students need to engage in a variety of formal and informal speaking situations, depending upon the purpose for speaking.

Some scaffolds to support speaking include the following:

- Discussing or developing with students criteria for a variety of formal and informal speaking formats (e.g., conversation, group discussion, role play), and posting these criteria on a bulletin board or having students record the criteria in notebooks for reference.
- Modelling a variety of formal and informal speaking formats for students.
- Providing tools and techniques to support speaking (e.g., wait time, index cards with key words, speaking frames).
- If possible, making available to students audio and video equipment so that they can practise prior to formal speaking situations.
- Providing practice time.

Post-Speaking (AFTER): A Time for Reflection and Setting Goals

Following speaking experiences, both formal and informal, it is important to have students reflect upon their performance. Their reflection, whether it is oral or written, should include the teacher, who can help them set personal goals for improving speaking abilities. This type of reflective assessment and goal setting encourages metacognitive and critical thought. Some purposes for post-speaking activities are listed below.

To reflect upon performance:

- Students who have opportunities to reflect upon their speaking experiences, in light of pre-determined criteria, grow in their abilities to speak effectively.

To set goals for improvement:

When students reflect upon their performance, they begin to recognize what they have done well and where they require improvement. Some post-speaking scaffolds include:

- Discussing or developing criteria for assessing a variety of speaking experiences and determining areas for future focus.
- Providing opportunities for students to talk, write, or represent in various ways allows students to determine personal speaking strengths and needs (e.g., learning logs, teacher/peer conferences) and to choose specific areas to improve.

When students have reflected upon their own speaking performance, peers may be invited to comment and suggest areas to improve. Peers may comment through a structure similar to a writing conference and may give oral feedback, written feedback, or a combination of the two. Conferences may be guided by specific questions determined by the teacher or may take the form of a structured conversation between peers.

The Language Cues and Conventions in Oral Communication

Effective speakers must consider and attend to the language cues and conventions before, during, and after speaking. Speakers must keep each of the cueing systems in mind:

- The pragmatic cues and conventions as students consider their audience and purpose, and the level of language that would be appropriate in their communication.
- The textual cues and conventions as students organize their ideas in an appropriate format. In addition, students need to ensure that the ideas within that format are connected using the appropriate transitional words.
- The syntactical cues and conventions as students choose and use sentences of varying patterns, lengths, and complexity to present the message.
- The semantic and lexical cues and conventions as students choose their words and take into consideration the denotative and connotative value of those words and the effect the words will have on the audience.
- The graphophonic aspects of language as students ensure their stress, pitch, and juncture are clear and appropriate.
- The other cues and conventions including visual aids, gestures, and physical arrangements that ensure the oral presentations are effective.

Supporting the Speaking Strand

Students' speaking skills develop best in interactive learning environments where enough time is provided for students to share and to listen to a

variety of ideas. A safe, comfortable, and relaxed atmosphere is critical for the development of productive talk in the classroom for all students and is particularly important for those students who may come from backgrounds that differ from the classroom norm. Classrooms should be places where students can ask and answer meaningful questions and in which the teacher and students are co-learners, collaborating with one another to communicate ideas and information. Different group sizes (pairs, small groups, and large groups) provide opportunities for students to practise the different thinking and oral skills unique to each configuration.

The role of the teacher is to:

- give students the opportunities to gather information, question, and interpret
- build on what students already know, as new knowledge is achieved by reconstructing and reshaping prior understanding
- ask questions that result in a diversity of thought and response, and to which there is not one right answer
- encourage purposeful talk and tentative "thinking aloud"
- attend to the thought and intent of students' responses as well as to the surface features of language including dialect
- develop or involve students in developing assessment instruments
- encourage peer assessment that focuses on strengths and areas for improvement
- value questions as much as answers
- share enthusiasm for the oral tradition by regularly reading and telling stories to students and by providing opportunities for students to tell stories
- encourage students to challenge their own and others' assumptions, prejudices, and information presented as facts
- promote students' abilities to develop and participate in reasoned argument during discussions and debates
- develop students' sensitivities to others' feelings, language, and responses
- set personal goals for communicating appropriately and effectively, and for understanding the needs of listeners and participants
- respect cultural traditions; allow and model wait/think time after questions and responses
- encourage and acknowledge effort and improvement as well as competence
- assess both processes and products.

The following should be observed in the classroom on a day-to-day basis:

- the students speaking for a variety of purposes and situations (e.g., small group discussion,

conversation, formal speeches, drama, debates, storytelling)

- the students developing social skills by interacting in a variety of small group situations (e.g., reader response groups)
- the teacher using brief mini-lessons to instruct students about language usage and formats for a variety of speaking situations (e.g., informal and formal individual, small group, and large group situations) and purposes (e.g., to inform, to persuade, to share feelings, to respond, to entertain)
- the teacher modelling standard English language usage
- the teacher and students assessing speaking on a continuous basis and taking into account both the processes and products.

Middle Level English language arts teachers can support the listening strand by:

1. making speaking a natural and integral part of each unit
2. modelling and discussing effective speaking behaviours and strategies
3. planning lessons that ensure the students achieve the outcomes for the speaking strand
4. supporting and guiding students as they move from informal speaking situations to more formal speaking tasks.

Each of these four points is described more fully in the sections that follow.

1. Make speaking a natural and integral part of each unit.

Loban (1976) studied the role of language, particularly oral language, in the development and growth of students from Kindergarten through Grade 12. Among his findings, he reported that there is a strong correlation between oral language and the other language arts and that students with less effective oral language abilities tend to have less effective written language and overall academic success. Oral language activities (and the associated skill and strategy instruction) should be an integral part of each unit. For example, consider some of the oral activities that could be used in a unit:

- a) As a class, discuss the theme and the focus questions of this unit. Focus a discussion on the conflicts, issues, and choices that students have viewed, heard about, experienced personally, or read about in the televised news.
- b) Have students break into groups of three and choose one of the conflicts, issues, or choices represented or another with which they are familiar. Invite students to role play a situation in

which representatives have to address the conflict, issue, or choice.

- c) In small groups of three or four, have students discuss the qualities that students admired in a character who faced a conflict, issue, or a difficult choice. Have them make a list and then share and compare their group's list of qualities with the lists of another group. What qualities do most people see as admirable?
- d) Have students meet with a partner and take turns interviewing each other about how they feel about the conflicts, issues, or choices that each character in the unit faced. How did each character deal with the conflict, issue, or choice and who was, in the classmate's opinion, the most admirable and why?
- e) Have students review all the texts that they have studied in the unit. Ask students what each text made them think about (e.g., What makes a person a hero, or what lessons can be learned from taking a risk?).

Middle Level teachers need to help students explore and communicate orally in a range of forms in each unit of study. A sample of possible speaking forms that might be used in a unit is found on page 8.

2. Model and discuss effective speaking behaviours and strategies.

Model and discuss effective speaking behaviours including respectful conversations. Good conversations set the tone and model the expectations teachers have for more structured discussions.

Students who have spent little time conversing in formal situations or a lot of time on "chat" lines and telephones with peers sometimes need a little extra coaching and modelling of "how" one talks to another person.

Talking to One Another

Teachers should plan lessons that allow time for both teacher and student talk. Consider the guidelines offered by the "Quarter System":

Quarter I: TEACHER talks to Students
Quarter II: STUDENTS talk to Teacher (e.g., asking questions)
Quarter III: ALONE TIME (i.e., no one talks)
Quarter IV: STUDENT talks to another student or in a group (e.g., paired review).

A similar guideline is represented by the acronym TAPS (Total Group, Alone, Partner, and Small Group) (Gregory & Chapman, 2002).

Talking in Groups

Middle Level teachers also should help students learn how to work in groups. Middle Level teachers can use and model the strategy (Whipple, 1975; Moffett & Wagner, 1992). Grouptalk takes the form of “rules.”

Starting Rules

- Read today’s question and tell yourself what it means.
- Discuss its meaning; tell others in your group what you think the question means.
- Decide on one meaning; agree on the meaning before you start answering the question.

Discussion Rules

- Contribute; give your thoughts on the question.
- Be relevant; stick to the subject.
- Listen; try to understand what someone else is saying.
- Respond; comment on what others have said.

Ending Rules

- Sum up; help in the summary by trying to remember the main ideas discussed.
- Evaluate; listen to the playback and comment on how well the Grouptalk rules were followed.

Grouptalk helps students learn how to discuss effectively. A tape recorder can be used to monitor the discussions.

Teachers can help students make the transition from Grouptalk to response and discussion circles. For example, when discussing a text in a response group, students might follow these guidelines:

Before the Session

- Finish viewing, listening to, or reading the text.
- Write down ideas in a journal to help get ready for discussion.
- Mark or note places in the text that you do not understand or passages that you like, disagree with, or find worth remembering.

During the Session

- Share ideas and offer suggestions.
- Answer questions others ask.
- Ask questions to help others clarify or expand on their points.
- Keep the group focused and on track.
- Encourage others to talk.
- Disagree without hurting others’ feelings.
- Give reasons for your opinions.

- Listen carefully and consider every speaker’s suggestions.

After the Session

- Evaluate your contribution to the group.
- Evaluate the overall success of your group.
- Plan the next session and consider ways to improve next time.

Key Questions When Speaking

Middle Level students can learn to ask key questions such as the following before, during, and after speaking activities.

Some Questions for Students to Consider Before Speaking.

Do I:

- use talk to inform, convince, or entertain others
- consider carefully why I am going to speak (purpose, audience, situation) in a more formal way
- think about what message and specific ideas I should present (e.g., brainstorm ideas, research)
- know exactly what I am going to say in a formal presentation
- know how I am going to organize what I want to say (introduction, body, conclusion) in a presentation
- know what props or audiovisual aids I will use
- rehearse and practise aloud?

Some Questions for Students to Consider During Speaking.

Do I:

- speak audibly and in a courteous manner
- share my thoughts, ideas, and feelings with others in appropriate ways
- use both the verbal and non-verbal elements of talk appropriately
- show energy and sincerity in my talking and presenting
- know when and how to listen to others
- interject politely
- paraphrase and expand on others’ points of view
- disagree tactfully
- make positive contributions to group discussions
- know when to end my talking or presenting?

Some Questions for Students to Consider After Speaking.

Do I:

- listen politely to the viewpoints of others
- consider feedback

- answer questions
- set goals to improve speaking abilities?

3. Plan lessons that ensure the students achieve the outcomes for the speaking strand.

It is important to plan speaking tasks that are inviting. In addition, teachers need to give students clear reasons for speaking along with meaningful and adequate **prompts**.

Whenever possible, prompts should help students know the answers to questions such as the following RAFTS (Adler & Vendaventer, 1989).

R (Role): Who am I? What is my role?

A (Audience): To whom am I communicating? Should I use a formal or informal stance?

F (Format): What format should I use while communicating?

T (Topic): What is the topic? Is it sufficiently focused?

S (Strong Verb): What am I trying to do in this communication (e.g., convince, request, prove, complain, persuade, pretend, entertain)?

Using these variables, Middle Level ELA teachers (and, with modelling and practice, students) can create useful and effective prompts such as the following:

As a **ROLE**, prepare a **FORMAT** to (an) **AUDIENCE**, Strong **VERB** about a **TOPIC**.

Or

You are a **ROLE**. Prepare a **FORMAT** to (an) **AUDIENCE**, Strong **VERB** about a **TOPIC**.

For example, “You are a **VISITOR** In your school from another **PLANET**. **TELL** your **FRIENDS** back home what you have seen in one of the rooms of your school.”

Mini-lessons

In addition to the Sample Lesson Planning Guide for Speaking on page 9, teachers can guide and model thinking through speaking tasks using before, during, and after strategies. Teachers can present mini-lessons, discussing and modelling strategies such as the following.

Some useful mini-lessons for the Pre-speaking Phase include:

- establishing a purpose

- considering the audience
- choosing and focusing the topic
- locating, gathering, and organizing relevant information
- selecting and preparing a text
- writing a script
- practising, preparing, and rehearsing
- setting a time frame.

Some useful mini-lessons for the During Speaking Phase are:

- introducing the speaker’s craft
- using notes and outlines
- using visual aids and props
- considering and attending to the audience
- analyzing presentation skills and techniques.

Some useful mini-lessons for the Post-speaking Phase include:

- responding to questions
- reflecting and self-assessing using audio and/or videotape
- discussing
- completing a learning log.

Think Sheets

Middle Level teachers also can prepare think sheets to guide students.

A Sample Think Sheet

Topic: About what am I speaking?

Who: To whom am I speaking?

Why: Why am I speaking?

What: What do I know?

How: How can I group my ideas?

How: How will I organize my ideas?

4. Support and guide students as they move from informal speaking situations to more formal speaking tasks.

Teachers can let students try on roles or personas to allow students to explore different “voices” when students speak. For example, “Harriet Tubman – The Second Moses”:

First Speaker: When Harriet Tubman was six years old, her childhood was over. Up until then, she had a carefree life on the plantation.

Harriet: The older children were already working in the fields. My mother was a cook at the Big House. My father picked cotton or worked in the piney woods.

Second Speaker: “Some day,” her mother said, “we will be free. The master promised me.” (Fisher, 1994, p. 81).

Speaking Frames

Teachers also can give students speaking frames to guide students when they are speaking.

A Sample Speaking Frame

The Introduction: How will I gain the attention of my audience, make my main point clear, lead into my speech? Which of the following would work for me?

- A startling statement followed by a short pause?
- A pointed question?
- A short anecdote (or joke)?
- A plunge into the subject?
- A description that sets the mood for what follows?

The Body: What are the key points or details that I want to share? In the body of my speech, I should move smoothly from one point to the next. I can arrange my details in order of importance, chronological order, comparison, or cause and effect. I must use language that lets my audience feel that I am sincere and know what I am talking about.

The Conclusion: How will I leave a strong, positive effect and remind my audience of the purpose of my speech? In the conclusion, I might tell my audience why I feel my topic is important or why it may be important in the future. I should know exactly what my final two or three sentences are going to be.

Sample Oral Language Forms

Possible Speaking Experiences (Forms)	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Unit 6 (optional)
Announcements						
Audio and Video Recording Activities						
Choral Reading or Speaking						
Committees						
Conferences						
Conversations						
Directions						
Discussion Groups						
Drama for an Audience						
Drama in Context						
Formal Speeches						
Improvisations						
Informal Debates						
Interest Talks						
Interviews						
Jigsaws						
Meetings						
Oral Readings						
Puppetry						
Reader's Theatre						
Role Playing						
Small Group Inquiry						
Storytelling						
Student Presentations and Reports						
Talking Circles						
Telephoning						
Other:						

Sample Lesson Planning Guide for Speaking

Outcome(s): (What will students learn and be able to do as a result of this activity?)

Assessment and Evaluation: (What evidence will demonstrate that students have achieved the outcome? What criteria and guidelines will help students know what is expected in this lesson?)

Task: (What is the task? What is the purpose? What is the prompt? Is it clearly stated? What mini-lesson(s) might be needed for students to succeed?)

Preparing to Speak: (What activities will help the students generate ideas for oral talks? What activities will help students to focus on the task and formulate a plan? What will help them develop a beginning, a middle, and an ending? What consideration should students give to their purpose, audience, and form? How long should the oral talk be? What audiovisual aids should be used? How will students prepare and rehearse their short talk/presentation?)

During Speaking: (What do students already know and do as speakers? What strategies can students use to support the oral presentation of their ideas? What specific activities or guidelines will help students to accommodate the needs of their listeners?)

After Speaking: (What do students not know or do as speakers? How will students consider feedback and assess themselves? What and how will they improve?)

Sample Teacher Checklist to Support Speaking

1. Do I provide opportunities for students to speak for a variety of purposes?
 - ☐ support students in speaking to clarify and extend thinking
 - ☐ help students to speak to share thoughts, opinions, and feelings
 - ☐ support students in speaking to build relationships and a sense of community
 - ☐ support students in speaking to inform and persuade
2. Do I use mini-lessons to instruct students about specific speaking strategies or to learn language usage and form?
 - ☐ analyze what students need to know and build on what they already know
 - ☐ provide focused lessons and model specific strategies for speaking effectively
 - ☐ provide short but focused direct instruction about a language concept, form, or issue at the time of need
 - ☐ provide mini-lessons for individuals or small groups of students, as required
3. Do I model and help students understand the role of speaking in communication and learn to apply standard English language usage as required?
 - ☐ note the importance of audience, purpose, and situation
 - ☐ explore the varieties of usage and speech dialects
 - ☐ discuss the preferred usage in formal and informal situations
4. Do I provide opportunities for students to speak in a variety of situations?
 - ☐ provide less formal speaking situations such as one-on-one conversations, think-pair-share sessions, talking circles, and small group discussions
 - ☐ include more formal speaking situations such as introductions, meetings, short talks/presentations, and oral readings
 - ☐ provide scaffolding, as required, to ensure student success
5. Do I provide opportunities for students to develop their social skills in pairs or small groups?
 - ☐ support students in allowing a speaker to finish without interrupting
 - ☐ focus student attention on practising a particular social skill in addition to accomplishing the speaking task
 - ☐ support students in acknowledging others' responses
 - ☐ support students in demonstrating respect for all persons regardless of race, gender, age, or ability
6. Do I provide support for students to use speaking/discussion as a means of learning?
 - ☐ encourage students to express and to refine ideas by talking and sharing them with others
 - ☐ encourage students to build on others' insights
 - ☐ use speaking guides that focus on main ideas, supporting details, or other criteria
 - ☐ support students in broadening their repertoire of speaking strategies and skills
7. Do I provide opportunities for students to function effectively as group members and leaders?
 - ☐ support students in responding sensitively to the viewpoints of others
 - ☐ help students to concentrate and focus on the task at hand
 - ☐ support students in accepting different roles in group work and making positive contributions
 - ☐ establish and model procedures to help groups discuss and work efficiently
8. Do I involve students in assessing speaking practices and behaviours?
 - ☐ support students in identifying their strengths and needs before, during, and after speaking
 - ☐ support students in considering teacher, peer, and self-assessments
 - ☐ provide checklists, rubrics, anecdotal notes, and other assessment forms and techniques
 - ☐ involve students in developing appropriate criteria to assess development of speaking practices and behaviours